

Alnwick Urban District.

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# ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health,

1910.



# ALNWICK URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

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## Medical Officer's Annual Report, 1910.

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GENTLEMEN,

One is apt in commenting on the health of a community to overlook the geographical position of the district. While the state of the weather and the purely local conditions are the chief factors in the incidence of disease, the physical features play a by no means inconsiderable part.

The town of Alnwick is situated at an average elevation of about 200 feet above the sea level, on the North-East shoulder or slope of a promontory crowned by Swansfield Hill at the convergence of two valleys forming a junction with the main valley of the River Aln. It faces North East and is sheltered from the South West by the rising ground of Alnwick Moor.

I must direct your attention, in the first place, to certain figures which are necessary to enable a comparison between this and previous years.

Our best months were June and September, and, if we include March, we have the three driest months of the year.

The average rainfall for the past ten years was 30.29 inches and this year it has been 30.61.

The total number of wet days was 198, a slightly larger number than in 1909. Want of sunshine is, to a great extent, adverse to the health of the people, yet, inasmuch as the absence of dust and flies has shown an absence of Summer Diarrhœa and similar ailments, it must be admitted that the cold Summer may after all have been a blessing in disguise.

Among the local conditions affecting the health of the inhabitants may be mentioned, that, as house accommodation for the labouring classes is insufficient, many are forced to live in narrow courts which too often are but ill ventilated and lighted—that the occupations are mainly those pertaining to residents in a small country town, but include that of one large manufacturing firm which employs mixed labour. In addition to this, a certain proportion of the young women are employed in dressmaking and kindred callings, nearly all of which entail long hours in workrooms and shops. Confinement such as this,

the prevalence of bad teeth, and probable errors in diet, (for instance, tea at most meals) produce a tendency to anæmia and indigestion which are the most common complaints we are called upon to treat. As to the causes of defective teeth, many reasons have been adduced—among them, the chemical constituents of the water.

For my part, I am quite at a loss to account for it, unless it is due to the want of that old fashioned wholemeal bread, whose praises have, of late, been so loudly sung by a prominent daily paper.

### Health Tables.

The first thing your Medical Officer does in compiling the vital statistics for the year is to reckon up the number of births and deaths. I have this year taken the district as a whole and the result is here shown.

TABLE A.

|                          |     |      |                |
|--------------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Estimated Population     | ... | 6800 | Rate per 1000. |
| Births                   | ... | 188  | 27·64          |
| Deaths—all Causes        | ... | 107  | 15·73          |
| „ Zymotic Disease        | ... | 1    | ·14            |
| „ Phthisis               | ... | 12   | 1·76           |
| „ Respiratory Disease    | ... | 14   | 2·05           |
| Infectious notifications | ... | 12   | 1·76           |

TABLE B.

A detailed list of the deaths is here given.

|                    |    |                  |     |    |
|--------------------|----|------------------|-----|----|
| Whooping Cough     | 1  | Alcoholism       | ... | 2  |
| Epidemic Influenza | 1  | Premature Birth  | ... | 1  |
| Enteritis          | 9  | Parturition      | ... | 1  |
| Phthisis           | 12 | Heart Disease    | ... | 9  |
| Other Tubercular   |    | Alimentary       | ... | 6  |
| Diseases           | 1  | Urinary          | ... | 9  |
| Cancer             | 4  | Cerebral         | ... | 10 |
| Bronchitis         | 6  | All other Causes | ... | 27 |
| Pneumonia          | 8  |                  |     |    |

TABLE C.

Here follow certain comparisons between 1910 and the average of the previous ten years.

| Year.                              | Estimated<br>Population. | BIRTHS. |                                 | TOTAL DEATHS IN DISTRICT. |  |              |                                 | Total Deaths<br>in Public<br>Institutions. | Deaths of<br>non-residents<br>in Public<br>Institutions. |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
|                                    |                          | Number. | Rate per 1000<br>of Population. | UNDER 1 YEAR.             |  | AT ALL AGES. |                                 |  |  |
|                                    |                          |         |                                 | Number.                   | Rate per 1000<br>Births<br>registered. | Number.      | Rate per 1000<br>of Population. |  |  |
| Average<br>for Years<br>1900-1909. | 6761                     | 177     | 26·27                           | 19·3                      | 119·54                                 | 120·3        | 17·8                            | 19   | 9·2  |
| 1910                               | 6800                     | 188     | 27·64                           | 16                        | 85·1                                   | 107          | 15·73                           | 18   | 11   |

The births recorded for the year are 188—93 males and 95 females—the largest total for the last ten years. A glance at Table C will show how this compares with former years—a very favourable comparison indeed.

On the other hand, the number of deaths is the smallest, with one exception, for the past decade, and, consequently, our death rate is proportionately low.

The infantile death rate is 34 per thousand less than the average for the past ten years, and, when we consider that this is the second year in succession in which similar weather conditions have prevailed, it helps to bear out the remarks I made in this connection last year.

The figures shown in the three Tables help to an understanding of the health of the inhabitants, but it is necessary to add a few particulars. 16 of the deaths were of Infants under one year, while 35, or more than one third of the aggregate, were of persons aged 65 and upwards. Ten of them were of persons over 80, the oldest registered being 90.

There were no deaths from accident or suicide, but we had one case returned as due to manslaughter.

It is a remarkable fact that, in the month of August, no deaths occurred. True it is, that one was notified, but that was of a man of 73 who, only a month before, been brought from outside the Urban District to the Workhouse.

I am sorry to say that the Phthisis death rate shows only a small decrease on the figures of the last two years. Deaths from Respiratory complaints have been rather more numerous, probably owing to the cold and wet weather experienced during the year.

Of the 12 cases of Infectious disease notified, 6 were of Scarlet Fever, 5 of Diphtheria and 1 of Erysipelas. Six were removed to the Isolation Hospital. Diphtheria patients have shown a marked falling off from the number of last year. In no instance could any direct infection be traced and this leads us still more strongly to believe that there are always “carriers,” who, under favourable circumstances, communicate the malady to others, without apparently suffering themselves.

Within the last few months a circular letter has been received from the Local Government Board, re the free supply of Diphtheria Anti-Toxin for those who are unable to provide it for themselves. This our Council, following on my recommendation in 1906, has been doing ever since.

Another possible danger to be reckoned with, of which, up to the present, I am glad to say we have had no experience, but which is receiving attention on the part of Health Authorities, is Plague.

It is a well established fact that the great disseminators of Plague are rats, and their wholesale extermination has been advocated. Other animals which also spread it are hares and rabbits amongst which, especially in the southern counties, plague is spreading—and the domestic cat and dog. These naturally catch the disease from the rat, and it is not difficult to see, considering the close contact of these animals with human beings, how infection is carried. Should Plague spread, the Council may be called upon at any time to co-operate in or to take measures for the destruction of these vermin. Whatever plans are adopted, it must not be forgotten that the disturbance of the balance of nature may not be the less evil.

### House Accommodation for the Working Classes.

This is practically in statu quo, and there is very little that I can add to my reports of recent years.

Certainly during 1910 eight houses have been erected in Lisburn Street, thus finishing the constructive scheme decided on some time ago, but again I cannot help saying that neither is the number sufficient nor is the rent within the means of those for whom they were primarily intended.

Now that the Canongate Sewerage Scheme is practically *un fait accompli* and the end of the water question in sight, you are in a position to turn your attention to the completion of the scheme for the improvement of Area number 2, by the demolition of the houses behind Clayport.

### Dairies and Milk Supply.

The number of Cowkeepers registered is 30. Seeing that the legislation to which I referred last year has not been forthcoming, I think the Board would be well advised if they took into consideration certain structural alterations which are necessary in some of the cowsheds and byres within their jurisdiction. These consist mainly in the provision of impervious floors, better drainage, and proper lighting. The question of air space might also receive attention.

To my mind the ideal condition of things would be to see more small holdings in the near neighbourhood tenanted by those who would make a business of keeping cows, and who would be willing to co-operate in the establishment of a central dairy for the supply of a sufficiency of pure milk and good butter.

### Slaughter Houses.

I think these will bear favourable comparison, both as regards construction and cleanliness, with those throughout the County, and the character of the meat sold in the Town is above suspicion.

I have never yet been called upon to condemn foodstuffs as unfit for consumption. Tuberculosis in meat has been, up to now, locally unknown.

I am glad to be able to report that a suitable depot for manure has been provided in the Allotments, and that the objectionable practice referred to last year will be discontinued.

### Sewerage and Drainage.

At the beginning of 1907 I suggested an extension of the Clayport sewer to the houses at the Bank Top. A year later I repeated the suggestion, but, so far, no action has been taken. As will be seen from Mr Milburn's report, a number of improvements has been affected in the private drains.

The Canongate Sewerage Works at a cost of £1400 were started in the month of July and will shortly be finished. Their completion—doubtless from different reasons—will be hailed with delight by all concerned. The cost of the scheme is being met out of the current rates.

It has yet to be seen whether the main works will require alteration in view of the extra amount of sewerage this imposes. As matters exist at present, the filter beds are acting very much better than they did under the old system when they were covered with willows. The extra drainage has also proved highly beneficial.

With the installation of the Canongate Sewerage referred to above, practically the only source of river pollution will be removed. A new main sewer has been laid at a cost of £75 on the South Side of Swansfield Park Road to serve two houses already built and those that may be erected.

As soon as the Canongate system is thoroughly established, nothing is necessary but to alter the position of the main outlet from the bed of the river, so as to discharge at a level above its normal height.

### Scavenging.

This is regularly carried out throughout the entire town twice weekly, with satisfactory results. Street watering has not been required so frequently owing to the wet season.

### Water Supply.

Last year the Council decided to ask for competitive schemes to ensure a better water supply for the town, such schemes to be submitted for adjudication by Mr Melliss.

The death of this gentleman before he was able to complete his report has unfortunately delayed matters. It was then resolved to call in the services of Major H. Tulloch whose decision at the time of writing has just come to hand. It has not yet been presented to the Council and I am therefore unable to comment upon it.

Pumping to the extent of five to six million gallons has been carried out at Hulne Park (Brizlee Springs) and the Rugley Culvert Springs for about 90 days.

Let us hope we are now in sight of a solution of the most urgent sanitary problem that has faced the town for a long time.

### Nuisances.

During the year only one statutory notice has been served for the abatement of a nuisance.

Small matters are attended to from time to time when necessity arises, as will be seen from Mr Milburn's report.

There is one point to which I would like to draw your attention and that is to the state of the middens, which are, owing to the peculiar construction of certain parts of the town, situated near to inhabited property. Several, to which I could refer, are too large—by this I mean that, if they were smaller, they would have to be oftener cleaned out.

### Factories and Workshops.

As the Inspector of Nuisances remarks, the only defects have been of a minor character and have been remedied as soon as pointed out. The Bakehouses have been regularly inspected and found in order. There is only one underground bakehouse in the town.

While on this subject it may not be altogether out of place to mention that your Medical Officer has not yet been afforded the opportunity of meeting and conferring with the Factory Inspector for the district.

### Medical Inspection of School Children.

All the Public Elementary Schools in the town are in good sanitary condition and the water supply is the same as that provided for the rest of the town. The Medical Examination of the scholars is in the hands of the County Council and is carried out by a whole time Medical Inspector.

### The Year's Improvements

1. A Total of 17 houses, forming 25 new dwellings, has been erected—all occupied except three in Stott Street.
2. Public Footways have been laid, viz.,
  - (a) With asphalt or tar paving, up Clayport Bank, the narrow lane to Hope House Field and Hope House Lane.
  - (b) With cement paving and whinstone channelling, in Swansfield Park Road on the North Side, if we except those portions of the footpath in front of the residences of certain owners who have not fallen in with the general scheme of improvements.
  - (c) With tar pavement in Fisher Lane, as far as the entrance to the Infirmary and with Macadam and whinstone channelling in the roadway for the same distance.

3. Public Lighting has been considerably improved in various places by the adoption of up-to-date burners and lamps.

4. By the demolition of the Crosshouse in Angel Inn Yard a great improvement has been effected.

The removal of the Old Brewery here is much to be desired.

5. I must again refer to the completion of the nine inch sewer in Swansfield Park Road, and the progress that has been made in the Canongate Sewerage Scheme, which, so far as I can learn, will be in working order in a very short time.

Mr Milburn's report follows, and from it will be seen that, as in past years, various improvements have been carried out, notably those in Elliott's and Crosby's Yards in Clayport.

In both cases old and neglected buildings—of no practical use—have been removed, to the manifest benefit of owner and occupier alike.

It can hardly be realised to what extent reforms such as these benefit the town. If owners of this class of property were really alive to their own interests—to say nothing of those of the community at large—there would be very little need for such action as has had to be taken in Area No. 2.

Once again I thank the Council for the attention they have given to the recommendations I have made from time to time, and I am happy to say that my relations with the officials continue to be cordial.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

R. B. ROBSON, M.B., (Dur.); M.R.C.S., (Eng.),

Medical Officer of Health.

COUNCIL OFFICES,  
GREEN BAT,  
ALNWICK,

JANUARY 25th, 1911.

TO THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

SIR,

I beg again to submit a brief report of work carried out in the Sanitary Department during the past year.

As the most important part of a Sanitary Inspector's work is the inspection of premises, with a view to finding out defects likely to give rise to unhealthy conditions, and the remedying of the same, I will state briefly what has been done under this head.

During the year good progress has been made in a quiet way with improvements to the drainage systems of a large number of premises, if application of test and examination of drains proved them to be defective, arrangements were made with owners of property to have a complete renewal carried out; where this was done, opportunity was taken to make the system as complete as possible, by suggesting the use of the best sanitary appliances and materials; wherever it could be arranged the efficiency of the system was added to by means of upcast vent shafts, if these are behind an intercepttrap they act in conjunction with the fresh air inlet, and if on an untrapped system they act with other vent shafts in relieving the pressure of sewer gas in the main sewers. If the defects found did not require a complete overhaul of the drainage system, the new work was so arranged as to form with the parts not interfered with as good a service as was compatible with present day ideas.

In connection with the properties which are classed as tenemented, many minor improvements have been carried out by repairing defects in the various sanitary conveniences used by the occupiers, and in relaying of defective drains serving such properties. One improvement effected in this case of property is worthy of special mention, this is at Elliott's property in Clayport, for years parts of these premises have been in a ruinous condition, some of the dwelling rooms being little better than the tumble down stable buildings behind, the drains and closets were as insanitary as it was possible for them to be; now all is changed, the building has been re-roofed floors and ceilings have been renewed, defective walls made good, closets, wash house, and coal houses have been built on old stable site, new drains with vent shaft, improved gullies, and up-to-date W.C. apparatus, take the place of defective ones, the whole improvement being such as could be carried out by numbers of other property owners, to the benefit of a large section of the town's inhabitants, who, though they cannot afford to rent a self-contained house, are wishful to live under better conditions than those which satisfied their fore fathers.

Disinfection has been carried out after all cases notified under the Infectious Diseases (notification) Act; where the patients were removed to the Isolation Hospital, the rooms vacated by them at their homes were disinfected as soon as possible, and in the case of

patients isolated in their own home, the disinfection was carried out as soon as their Medical Attendant certified them clear of infection.

### **Inspection of Cowsheds.**

The cowsheds which are occupied by the 30 registered cow keepers in the district have been inspected from time to time, any defects notified at times of inspection were rectified by occupiers, when their attention was called to them, these principally had reference to neglect to have premises kept sweet by lime wash, undue delay in having dung removed from the premises, or unsatisfactory daily cleansing of premises ; the keeping of a pig inside of cow byre was also a practice which had to be abated by one cow keeper who in consideration of the pig's comfort, neglected to consider the hygienic surroundings of his cows when housed with such company.

The passing of a Milk and Dairies' Bill was in anticipation when you issued your last year's report, now that it has been dropped, you may have something to say with respect to certain of these structures.

### **Inspection of Common Lodging Houses.**

The two registered Common Lodging Houses have been periodically inspected during the year, the cleanliness and good order of both has been good, only on rare occasions has it been necessary to call keepers' attention to slight oversights which have to be observed in such places in order to keep them up to the proper standard. For two or three years previous to this a class of persons were frequenting both of these houses, chiefly I believe, owing to low price charged for lodging, which were no credit to either the lodging houses or town, the price of their bed being easy to get in comparison with other towns, they were a constant source of annoyance to house holders whom they pestered by begging, and a trouble to the police who generally were the medium by which the worst of them were moved along to fresh quarters. The price of lodgings being now higher fewer persons are staying over night, and these of a more respectable class, but it is interesting to know that while the district is gaining by the keeping out of undesirables, the owners of the lodging houses do not suffer by loss of revenue, as the takings for the smaller number for last year, exceeds the average of previous three years with larger numbers.

### **Workshops and Bakehouses.**

The workshops and retail bakehouses in the town have been kept under observation, principally with a view to the Sanitary arrangements used by the workers being kept free from nuisance or offence, such defects as were found at times of inspection, were made good by parties responsible for conditions, at a number of premises in addition to minor matters remedied improvements have been effected, additional accommodation has been provided in one case, and in another where the old arrangement had become a nuisance, a new convenience for use of workers was erected, with addition of new drain service.

JOSEPH MILBURN,

Assoc. Royal San. Inst.,

Inspector of Nuisances.

